

December 17, 1964

To: J. P. T. Pearman, Executive Director  
Exobiology Summer Study

From: Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

Subj: Recommendations of Plenary Sessions - November 6, 1964

As I was not present at the meeting, I can hardly complain about having to make an exception, but I must record a formal dissent to Item 9. This may be a highly academic question except in any international discussions, but these may be crucial in the next few years.

I do not believe we can justify any lander on Mars before we have had the benefit of comprehensive orbital reconnaissance.

The basis of this position (which I have reached only gradually), is detailed in other material already submitted. Briefly, we cannot make a scientifically honest appraisal of the potentially immense risks of contamination, and of the prudence of our response to them, without much more information about Mars than we now have. And the only really safe way to collect such information is from a distance.

It goes without saying that we have to make extensive preparations for a landing, e.g., the design of an ABL, in advance; otherwise we would lose 5 to 10 years lead from the time we could decide to land and under what stringencies.



Joshua Lederberg

JL:as

cc: C. S. Pittendrigh  
O. E. Reynolds